

OVERALL PRODUCTION

A loyal audience anticipated a fun filled evening at their home based panto in the Hanham Folk Centre. I had not seen this group for a few years and was interested to note a change of Director and some members of the cast, and was pleased to see that you still have your indomitable Dame who must be a sort of institution in your area by now!

The mostly young, lively cast kept the action moving along at a generally slick pace with imaginative choreography, colourful costumes, striking scenery and effects. The cast list, refreshingly long, gave lots of opportunity for contrasting characterisations for all ages.

My main observation was concerning the unusual breaks in the continuity which I feel, even in a pantomime, is important. For instance, having the children from the audience up on stage for "Tom, Tom the Piper's Son" in Act 1 seemed odd. Then again, having the raffle suddenly introduced after we had all been swept along by the scene on the island with a certain amount of suspense, seemed very out of place. Finally, much as Lauren Deaker your talented gymnast was appreciated by the audience, her display had no connection with the story, so here again it took us away from our involvement with Tom, the Piper's Son. The song sheet traditionally comes down just before the Grand Finale and the raffle is much better held in the interval.

I feel I must mention the four little girls in identical costumes and blond 'Shirley Temple' curly wigs. This was a highlight of the show, but I was disappointed that they didn't sing "On the good Ship Lollipop" as they were, after all, about to embark and were on the quay-side!

I wondered why Marigold's solo dance had been cut, could Tom not have mimed playing on his pipes to taped music? This would have been effective and a gesture to the title of the show.

The fight scene with the all important "sword on the tree" was rather unfocused and lacked excitement, the Knave talking through the beginning of it was very distracting and I felt it needed dramatic music and effects.

One last point, always encourage the cast to place themselves facing down stage for dialogue.

The company and technical crew had clearly worked hard together as a team to present a good show and your audience response was enthusiastic.

MUSICAL DIRECTION AND SINGING

A lively supportive band with piano, percussion and electric guitar kept us all tapping our toes and enjoying the selection of appropriate numbers. "It's a most unusual day", "Where is love", "The first man you'll remember", "Ha, ha, ha, ho, ho, ho" from the Wizard of Oz "I'm on top of the world", "They'll never split us apart" and especially "I love to cry at weddings" were all memorable.

The chorus singing was under projected at times, young people can bring the house down as we all know, but it takes a lot of rehearsal time to get through the self-conscious barrier to a state of confidence!

I have already mentioned the lack of pipe music which could have been a treat. The orchestra must do a good job with all the usual comic routines.

SET DESIGN

This was first class and had the pantoland flavour of a story book land somewhere in the 17th/18th century. Striking and colourful, the south sea island was especially evocative. I note that the credits for the backstage team has many mentions of the dedicated Lawrence Family - you must be a great asset to the Hanham Players.

LIGHTING, SOUND AND EFFECTS

These were all integral to the success of the show, the flashes and spots were all effectively on cue and the subtle lighting changes gave atmosphere and beauty to the dance numbers and romantic duets.

The props were not as onerous as for some pantos: I wondered why the 'sword on the tree' and the 'tree of truth' could not have been a little more ambitious as in the author's notes.

COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

I note that you had hired your costumes from Dauphine's which were excellent, but I suspect that quite a few of the dancers costumes had been made to match and, of course, Dame's were outstanding - really sensational as our amazement at each entrance increased. They would certainly have been worthy of the Hippodrome stage. I particularly admired the orange outfit with black and white stripes and the tropical get-up on the island, all with coordinating wigs and make-up.

The King and Queen looked splendid in their red and blue as did the Knave and Fairy Harmony and of course, the finale was spectacular, in fact the Dame's crinoline was almost too big for your relatively small stage.

The make-up looked acceptable except for Georgie Porgie, who being up against the Dame for most of the time, looked very pale indeed. The Knave could have had an evil eye make-up and glitter too.

CHOREOGRAPHY

This was of a high standard: the dancers were well disciplined and their routines ranging from tap to ballet, including 'on pointe' were impressive. I was a bit concerned over the tap dancer wearing a long dress in the palace! The dancers wearing the frames only for hoop skirts in the Wizard of Oz number were a special highlight and the graceful ballet sequence in Act II. One small point, I wondered why "I'm on top of the world" sung so well by a group of children, had not been choreographed. The tap dance by the sailorettes at the opening of Act II was a show stopper.